DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 199 799 CS 503 317

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TITLE The Dimensions of Prejudice and Their Relationship to Defensive Attribution: A Study in Interracial Communication.
PUB DATE Feb 81
NOTE 25p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Speech Communication Association (San Jose, CA, February 14-17, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Affective Behavior; Attribution Theory; *Behavioral Science Research; Black Stereotypes; Communication Research; Distance; Higher Education; *Interpersonal Competence; Negative Attitudes; *Racial Bias; *Racial Relations
IDENTIFIERS *Defensiveness; Interpersonal Communication; *Social Distance

ABSTRACT

Tests were constructed to measure three dimensions of prejudice related to interracial communication: stereotyping, affective reactions, and communicative social distance. A test was also constructed to measure the type of attributional choices made about blacks. The attributional choices were either defensive (negative and stereotypical) or nondefensive (positive and nonstereotypical). The reliability of these tests was assessed and the following hypotheses were tested: (1) The attributions made about blacks are significantly different from the attributions made about people whose race is unknown. (2) Highly prejudiced people are significantly more defensive in their attributions about blacks than are randomly selected people in their attributions about actors whose race is unknown. (3) There is a positive correlation between each of the three dimensions of prejudice on attributional defensiveness. (4) The effects of the three dimensions of prejudice on attributional defensiveness are additive such that each dimension has a significant, unique, and independent contribution to attributional defensiveness. Analyses of responses from 300 randomly selected college students confirmed the four hypotheses. (Author/RL)

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THE DIMENSIONS OF PREJUDICE AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO DEFENSIVE ATTRIBUTION: A STUDY IN INTERRACIAL COMMUNICATION

BY

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*The author would like to acknowledge the assistance of Charles O. Tucker and Halbert Gulley of Northern Illinois University.

A paper presented at the annual meeting of the Western Speech Communication Association, San Jose, February 15, 1981.

CSSD33/7

THE DIMENSIONS OF PREJUDICE AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO DEFENSIVE ATTRIBUTION: A STUDY IN INTERRACIAL COMMUNICATION

Several writers have recognized the intimate relationship between Attribution Theory and human communication.[1] According to Berger, "The assertion that 'meanings are in people' implies that man, as a communicating animal, is actively engaged in the process of attributing meanings to the verbal and non-verbal message events he perceives in his environment."[2] This study sought to determine if there was a relationship between the dimensions of prejudice and attributions (i.e. inferences about the causes of behavior) made about members of other racial groups as well as something about what the nature of that relationship might be.

Prejudice is defined here as a negative, categorical attitude

[1]Clifford Swenson, Introduction to Interpersonal Relations (Glenview, Ill.: Scott Foresman and Co., 1973), pp. 266-272; Stephen Littlejohn, Theories of Human Communication (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Pub. Co., 1978), pp. 230-237; Harold Kelly, Attribution in Social Interaction (New York: General Learning Press, 1971); David Kanous, Language, Labeling and Attribution (New York: General Learning Press, 1971); Charles R. Berger, "Task Performance and Attributional Communication as Determinants of Interpersonal Attraction," Speech Monographs, Vol. 40 (November, 1973): 280-286; Stuart Kaplan, "Attribution Processes in the Evaluation of Message Sources," Journal of the Western Speech Communication Association (Summer, 1976): 189-195; Berger, C. R. "Proactive and Retroactive Attribution Processes in Interpersonal Communications," Human Communication Research, Vol. 2 (Fall, 1975): 33-50.

[2]Berger, p. 280.

directed against an entire group of people and individual members of that group. Attitudes are generally depicted as possessing three dimensions: cognitive, affective, and action tendency.[3] In the specific case of prejudice in interracial communication the three dimensions considered are stereotyping (universally applied to rarely applied), affective reactions (feelings with a positive to negative valence), and communicative social distance (intimate communicative relationships to avoidance of communication). Past research on prejudice, however, has emphasized the stereotyping (cognitive) dimension and non-communicative aspects of social distance. This study only dealt with prejudice against blacks as a means of simplifying and narrowing its scope.

Theory and Review of Literature

It is axiomatic that people need to make sense of their experiences with others. They assign meanings to the behaviors of others. Kanous explains that, "It seems likely that at least part of the individual's motivation in forming causal attributions is to make sense of the world around him."[4] This study will argue that people make sense of their experiences from within their existing frame of reference. This is to say that people attempt to provide interpretations to their experiences with others (attributions) that are consistent with their

[3] M. Rokeach, Beliefs, Attitudes, and Values (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1970).

[4] Kanous, Language, Labeling, and Attribution, p. 13.

existing attitudes.

It is easier for the prejudiced person to assimilate new information than to accomodate his attitude to fit the new information. According to Kanous, "Once . . . [an individual] has found a 'conceptual good figure' that accounts for a particular phenomenon he is likely to assimilate new information into an existing conceptual structure whenever possible."[5] The major contention of this study is that prejudiced people will resort to a defensive form of attribution when their preconceptions are unsupported by interaction with members of the outgroup. By attributing the causes of the nonstereotypic behavior of outgroup members to a cause that is negative and consistent with a stereotype the prejudiced individual can avoid dissonance and maintain her attitude.

When people observe the behavior of other people and attribute it to some causal factor, they can attribute it to either something about the observed person's personality (i.e., an internal attribution), or something about the situation or environment in which the behavior occured (i.e., an external attribution). In other words, when a behavior is observed, the observer can simply say, "You see, that is the way he is," or she can attribute the cause to some unique situational imperative. Thus, when an external attribution is made, the behavior does not reflect upon the nature of the observed person's character or personality. Likewise, attributions can be viewed as either temporary or stable. Behavior can be attributed to a temporary motive or

[5] Kanous, p. 13.

to an enduring personality trait.

Deaux reviewed a series of studies that indicated that when women succeed on masculine tasks their success is attributed to a temporary cause (effort or luck). She argues that this is the result of "stereotyped expectancies." Deaux also contends that this principle can be generalized to attributions made in interracial contexts.

> If, for example, members of a particular ethnic group are considered lower in competence than members of another ethnic group . . . success by members of the negatively valued group will be explained by temporary reasons, while success by the favored group will be credited to inherent ability.[6]

The present study did not simply seek to replicate the results of the Deaux studies using blacks as the outgroup. There are several reasons for departing from the method and theory described by Deaux. First, racism and sexism differ on the affective reactions and social distance dimensions. In fact, only the stereotyping dimension was considered in the studies reviewed by Deaux. Second, the studies reviewed by Deaux did not attempt to measure stereotyping but merely assumed subjects to hold certain expectations about the ability of women. It is reasonable to expect that not everyone is equally prejudiced and that attributions will vary with the amount of prejudice. It is also possible that all three dimensions of prejudice contribute to the attributional choices made about blacks. This study, therefore,

[6] Kay Deaux, "Sex: A Perspective on the Attribution Process," in New Directions in Attribution Research, Vol. 1, eds. Harvey, Ickes, and Kidd (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erbaum Associates, 1976), pp. 335-352.

measured all three dimensions of prejudice. Third, the Deaux studies only dealt with limited types of situations (success or failure), limited types of stereotypes (ability or lack of ability), and limited types of attributional choices (ability, effort, luck). The present study deals with a variety of stereotypes (eight of the most common), in a variety of situations, and offers a variety of different attributional choices which are relevant and tailored to each specific situation. Each of these attributional choices can be described as internal or external, temporary or stable and therefore can be labeled as defensive or non-defensive.

The central principle of the Deaux studies is, therefore, expanded. When communication with blacks confirm the prejudiced person's expectation--when the black's behavior is stereotypical--then the behavior will be attributed to the stereotypic trait. When the behavior of a black fails to confirm the prejudiced person's expectancy, then the behavior will be attributed to an external cause and/or a temporary or transitory cause. In either case the attribution will be negative in its evaluation of the actor. This is what is meant by defensive attribution in the context of this study. For example, if a black student is flunking out of school because she has to work and so has no time to study, a prejudiced individual can simply say, "She is not smart enough to pass anyway," and ignore the plausible external cause. On the other hand, if a black student is making straight A's, the prejudiced person can invent an excuse such as, "His teachers give him A's so they won't look prejudiced." A prejudiced person can also make a defensive internal (yet temporary) attribution. If a black behaved

in a friendly manner, and the prejudiced person believed that all blacks are hostile and unfriendly, the prejudiced person could simply say, "She is trying to butter me up, or lull me into a false sense of security, or she wants something from me." Finally, to be considered truly defensive an attributional explanation should be inherently less plausible than other alternative explanations.

Hypotheses

Whereas prejudice is considered the key factor in attributional defensiveness, it is also reasonable to expect that, regardless of attitudes, people make different attributions about members of other races than they make about members of their own race. When prejudice is not considered, however, the theory does not indicate how these attributions will differ in terms of attributional defensiveness. The first hypothesis is, therefore, nondirectional. H_1: The attributions made about blacks are significantly different from the attributions made about people whose race is unknown.

The theory is directly concerned with how highly prejudiced people causally attribute the behavior of outgroup members. Hence, H_2: Highly prejudiced people are significantly more defensive in their attributions about blacks than are randomly selected people in their attributions about actors whose race is unknown.

This study argues that prejudice is the key factor in explaining attributional defensiveness. In addition, each of the three dimensions of prejudice are considered important in explaining attributional

choices. Two more hypotheses were, therefore, tested. H_3: A positive correlation exists among each of the three dimensions of prejudice and attributional defensiveness. As an extension of hypothesis three I will forward H_4: The effects of the three dimensions of prejudice on attributional defensiveness are additive such that each dimension has a significant unique and independent contribution to the variance of attributional defensiveness.

Method

The present study consisted of three major stages. In the first stage eight pre-study questionnaries were distributed to a panel of judges[7] for the purpose of constructing a reliable measure of the three dimensions of prejudice and attributional tendencies in interracial communication. In the second stage a pilot study was conducted to test the reliability of the measuring instruments and to preview the plausibility of the two correlational hypotheses. In the third stage (the final study). the reliability of the scales was rechecked and all four major hypotheses were tested.

Measuring Instruments

Stereotyping was measured by a series of scales on which subjects

[7] The panel of judges consisted of (1) two sections of a basic level communication class; (2) students enrolled in a sociology course in intergroup relations; and (3) various members of the faculty in communication and sociology.

indicated whether they believed All, Most, Some, or Very Few blacks were characterized by common stereotypic traits. Two pre-study questionnaires yielded the eight most common stereotypes held about blacks.[8] A series of scales designed to measure the degree of conviction that subjects had in their answers was also included.

The affective dimension was measured by a series of ten scales in which subjects projected how they would react to the most typical member of the black race. Terms that described both positive and negative feelings (reactions) were placed in a scale which asked subjects if they would Always, Most Often, Sometimes, Seldom, or Never react in the way described by the terms when communicating with the average black. Two pre-study questionnaires yielded fifteen terms (feelings, reactions) which were consistently rated as possessing either positive or negative valence and also as indicative of either prejudiced or non-prejudiced attitudes. The reliability check for the pilot study led to the elimination of five scales leaving the ten scales used in the final study.

The communicative social distance dimension was measured by three different sets of scales. The first set of scales measured the degree of disclosure that subjects projected that they might be willing to

[8] The eight stereotypes used in the final study are as follows: ignorant, defiant of authority, ostentatious (showy), inarticulate, lazy, hostile, noisy, dumb. No positive stereotypes passed the pre-study criteria as sufficiently common to be included in the test for prejudice. The pilot study also showed that these stereotypes were inversely correlated with the rating of their polar opposite terms.

engage in with the average black. The second set measured the degree of disclosure that subjects projected that they would be willing to listen to blacks engage in. The third set of scales measured the situations under which subjects projected that they would be willing to come into contact with the average black. In two pre-study questionnaires the panel of judges rank ordered the statements for each set of scales according to the degree of social distance and prejudice each statement indicated. In the studies subjects indicated whether they would Always, Most Often, Sometimes, Seldom, or Never behave in the manner indicated by each statement in reaction to the "average or most typical black."

The dependent variable in this study was defensive attributional tendencies. To measure this variable situations were described in which blacks were depicted as behaving in either stereotypic and negative ways (two stories) or in nonstereotypic and positive ways (six stories). After each of these situations an equal number of defensive and nondefensive attributional choices were provided. Subjects were asked to indicate how probable it was that each particular choice was responsible for the behavior or outcome of the behavior in question. This was done by utilizing a scale that allowed subjects to indicate if the cause (attributional choice) under consideration was Definitely, Probably, Possibly, Unlikely, or Impossible to be considered responsible for the behavior in question. Two pre-study questionnaires indicated that when the race of the characters was not included in the stories the nondefensive attributional choices were

rated consistently more plausible as explanations of the behaviors depicted in the stories than the defensive attributional choices.

Procedure

Fifty-eight subjects participated in the pilot study. The method and results of the pilot study will not be presented here as they were essentially the same as those of the final study. Suffice it to say that reliability was determined by intercorrelating each of the specific items for each dimension of prejudice with each other item in its own test. The same procedure was followed for the attributional defensiveness items. Individual items were also correlated with the sum of the items on that particular test. The unreliable items were eliminated for the final study.

In the final study the reliability was rechecked by correlating each item with the sum of the items in that test $r = .52$ to $.79$ ($p < .001$). These correlations were carried out using Spearman Correlation.

Three hundred subjects from a total of 15 randomly selected sections of "The Fundamental of Speech Communication" course at a large midwestern university participated in the final study.[9] Ten of these sections--200 subjects--took the tests for prejudice and

[9] There were a total of 76 sections of this class. The class is a required course and so the students were fairly representative of the population of the school. In addition, the school is relatively heterogenious. The hazards of using students is well known and should be born in mind when generalizations are made.

defensive attribution. Five of these sections--100 subjects--acted as a control group and took the attribution test in which the characters in the stories were not identified as to their race. The demographics of the research group are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1

RESEARCH GROUP DEMOGRAPHICS

Race	Frequencies	Percentage
White	181	90.5%
Black	8	4.0%
Asian or Pacific Islander	5	2.5%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0	0.0%
Other or refuses to say	6	3.0%
Sex	**Frequencies**	**Percentage**
Males	97	48.5%
Females	103	51.5%

Because of the small percentage of minority group members in the sample no reliable comparison between racial groups was possible.

All data transformations and statistical procedures were carried out by computer using The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.[10]

[10] Norman Nile; C. Hadlai Hull; Jean Jenkins; Karin Steinbrenner;

The significance level was placed at .05.

The first hypothesis was tested by conducting a t-test between the mean score for attributional defensiveness of the research group and the mean score for attributional defensiveness of the control group.

The second hypothesis was directional and was tested by performing a t-test between the mean score for attributional defensiveness for highly prejudiced subjects and the mean score for attributional defensiveness for the control group. In order to separate out of the research group, only those subjects who were highly prejudiced, the scores for the three tests for prejudice were summed to produce a score for total prejudice. The mean score on total prejudice among all 200 subjects in the research group was -7.91 and the standard deviation for the variable total prejudice was 26.22. Subjects who scored one standard deviation above the mean on total prejudice (greater than 18) were labeled as highly prejudiced and selected to form a new group. This procedure produced 31 cases that were one standard deviation above the mean on total prejudice. The t-test was then performed between this new group of highly prejudiced subjects and the control group.

The third hypothesis was tested using Pearson Correlation performed between the total scores for each of the three dimensions of prejudice and attributional defensiveness scores.

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and Dale Bent, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1975).

The fourth hypothesis was tested using multiple regression analysis. Three stepwise regression runs were performed using hierarchical inclusion such that each of the three independent variables (dimensions of prejudice) were entered last into the regression equation one time. This method allows for the decomposition of the R^2 into the "unique contribution" of each independent variable to the explained variance of the dependent variable (attributional defensiveness).

Defensive and nondefensive attributional choices were supposedly measuring opposite attributional tendencies. The scoring of these two groups of choices was, therefore, opposite. All the tests to this point were based upon the pooled scores from both defensive and nondefensive choices under the label of attributional defensiveness. Since these two groups of choices measure opposite tendencies and are scored in opposite ways--a double negative--one would expect both groups to be positively correlated with prejudice. To test this assumption the variable total prejudice was correlated independently with both defensive and nondefensive attributional choices using Pearson Correlation.

Results

The first hypothesis, that a difference exists in the attributions made about blacks and the attributions made about people whose race is unknown, received support. The mean score for attributional defensiveness for the research group was -14.78 and the mean of the

control group was -12.62 for attributional defensiveness.[11] The *t* value was equal to 2.83 (d.f. 288) which is significant at the .005 level when the separate variance estimate is used.[12] The nondirectional null hypothesis can be rejected. These results indicate that the research group was significantly less defensive than the control group! These results are summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2

DIFFERENCE IN ATTRIBUTIONAL DEFENSIVENESS BETWEEN THE RESEARCH GROUP AND THE CONTROL GROUP

	# of Cases	Mean	Standard Deviation	Separate Variance Estimate		
				T Value	D.F.	2-Tail Prob.
Research Group	193	-14.7824	8.561			
Control Group	97	-12.6186	4.452	-2.83	287.65	.005

Since the research group, in this case, is probably composed of low and moderately prejudiced people as well as highly prejudiced

[11] The negative means are an artifact of the scoring system used. The fact that a mean is negative or positive--either for prejudice or attributional defensiveness--says nothing except in relationship to other means. The important thing is how negative or positive the mean is in relation to other means.

[12] Nile; Hull; Jenkins; Steinbrenner, SPSS, pp. 269-270; On the SPSS printout both a "pooled variance estimate" and a "separate variance estimate" are issued. Selection of the correct statistic depends upon whether the two populations have equal or unequal variances. In this case the separate variance estimate is appropriate.

people it is still possible that highly prejudiced subjects will be more defensive than the control group. The assumption made here is that there are probably more low and moderately prejudiced people than there are highly prejudiced people, and that the nondefensiveness of their scores pulled the mean of the total research group in the direction of nondefensiveness.

The second hypothesis, that highly prejudiced subjects are more defensive in their attributions about blacks than are randomly selected subjects in their attributions about people whose race is unknown, received support. The mean score for attributional defensiveness for the 31 highly prejudiced subjects was -6.20 whereas the mean score for the control group was -12.62. The *t* value for the separate variance estimate for the difference is equal to 4.23 (d.f. 35), which is significant beyond the .001 level. This difference is in the anticipated direction and, therefore, the null hypothesis can be rejected.[13] These results are summarized in Table 3.

The third hypothesis, that a positive correlation exists among each of the three dimensions of prejudice and attributional defensiveness, was supported. Stereotyping was positively correlated with attributional defensiveness with an r value of .54, which is statistically significant at the .001 level. Affective reactions were positively correlated with attributional defensiveness with an r value

[13] Because of the disproportionate n between the two groups the results of the *t*-tests must be interpreted with caution. In addition, one should keep in mind that subjects in the second *t*-test were self selected on the basis of their scores for prejudice and hence the interpretation of this result is affected.

equal to .54, which is statistically significant at the .001 level. Communicative social distance was positively correlated with attributional defensiveness with an r value of .59, which is also significant at the .001 level. See Table 4 for the summary of these results.

TABLE 3

DIFFERENCE IN ATTRIBUTIONAL DEFENSIVENESS BETWEEN HIGHLY PREJUDICED SUBJECTS AND THE CONTROL GROUP

	# of Cases	Mean	Standard Deviation	Separate Variance Estimate		
				T Value	D.F.	2-Tail Prob.
Highly Prejudiced	30	-6.2000	7.941	4.23	34.81	0.000
Control Group	97	-12.6186	4.452			

TABLE 4

DIMENSIONS OF PREJUDICE CORRELATED WITH ATTRIBUTIONAL DEFENSIVENESS

	Stereotyping	Affective Reactions	Social Distance
Attributional Defensiveness	r = 0.5371 n = 193 S = .001	r = 0.5410 n = 192 S = .001	r = 0.5948 n = 193 S = .001

The fourth hypothesis, that each dimension of prejudice contributes uniquely to attributional defensiveness, also received support. The results of the decomposition of R^2 show that 6% of the variance of the dependent variable can be explained by the unique contribution of stereotyping ($F = 22.16$, d.f. = 3/188). The unique contribution of affective reactions explained 2% of the variance of the dependent variable ($F = 7.48$, d.f. = 3/188). The unique contribution of communicative social distance explained 4% of the variance of attributional defensiveness ($F = 14.24$, d.f. = 3/188). Each unique contribution is the change in R^2 when that variable is entered last in the regression equation. All unique contributions were significant at the .01 level of significance. The three independent variables in combination explain 45% of the variance of the dependent variable. The remainder of the 45% total explained variance not accounted for by the unique contributions of the three independent variables (33%) can be attributed to their "common contributions." The results of the three regression runs are summarized in Table 5.[14]

Finally, it was hypothesized that prejudice would be correlated with both defensive and nondefensive attributional choices independently. The results of the correlations show that prejudice was significantly correlated with defensive attributional choices ($r = .61$) and with nondefensive choices ($r = .57$). These results are summarized in Table 6.

[14] Since the three independent variables were intercorrelated (i.e., there was a degree of Multicollinearity) the results of the Multiple Regression Analysis must be interpreted with care.

TABLE 5

SUMMARY OF THREE STEPWISE REGRESSION RUNS. DIMENSIONS OF PREJUDICE REGRESSED ON ATTRIBUTIONAL DEFENSIVENESS

Run #1	D.F.	R Square	R Sq. Change	Beta	F Score*	Significance
Stereotyping	1/190	.29301	.29301	.54133	78.746	.01
Social Distance	2/189	.42947	.13646	.43096	45.206	.01
Affective Reactions	3/188	.45131	.02184**	.20591	7.483	.01
Run #2						
Social Distance	1/190	.35454	.35454	.59543	104.363	.01
Affective Reactions	2/189	.38663	.03209	.24785	9.887	.01
Stereotyping	3/188	.45131	.06468**	.29880	22.163	.01
Run #3						
Affective Reactions	1/190	.29265	.29265	.54097	78.607	.01
Stereotyping	2/189	.40977	.11712	.37891	37.503	.01
Social Distance	3/188	.45131	.04155**	.29925	14.235	.01

* All F values are for the change in R^2 at that step.

** Unique contributions.

TABLE 6

PREJUDICE CORRELATED WITH DEFENSIVE AND NONDEFENSIVE ATTRIBUTIONAL CHOICES

	Defensive Choices	Nondefensive Choices
Total Prejudice	r = 0.6109	r = 0.5736
	n = 192	n = 195
	Sig. = .001	Sig. = .001

Discussion

The attributions about the behavior of blacks made by randomly selected subjects are significantly less defensive than the attributions made about people whose race is unknown (people in general). This indicates that the majority of people--those that are not highly prejudiced--may be more than willing to give a favorable interpretation to the behavior of blacks. Much more research needs to be conducted concerning how nonprejudiced people behave in interracial communication encounters.

The attributions made about the behavior of blacks by highly prejudiced people, however, appear to be significantly more defensive than the attributions made by randomly selected subjects about people in general. When the results of all the hypotheses are examined together one can see that prejudice is a key factor in producing attributional defensiveness in interracial communication.

There is a relationship between each of the three dimensions of prejudice and attributional defensiveness. Each of the three dimensions appear to contribute uniquely to attributional defensiveness so that the effects of the three dimensions are additive in explaining attributional defensiveness. The unique contributions while significant are, however, small in their contribution to defensiveness (12%). The total contribution (45%) of all three dimensions and their common contribution (33%) are much more significant. Nevertheless, I will argue that all three dimensions of prejudice should be considered if one is to gain a full understanding of how prejudice operates in interracial communication.

It is already widely accepted that prejudice is an extremely enduring attitude. Some studies have shown that contact and interaction with the outgroup can reduce prejudice, other studies have failed to demonstrate this relationship, whereas still others have shown an increase in prejudice following interaction with the outgroup.[15] The mixed findings of such studies indicates that researchers need to pay more attention to communication variables involved in interracial interaction. The results of this study provide evidence that the attribution process offers the prejudiced person a viable defense mechanism that allows him to maintain his prejudice in the face of contact and interaction with members of the outgroup that fail to

[15] For a review of these studies see George Simpson and Milton Yinger, Racial and Cultural Minorities: An Analysis of Prejudice and Discrimination 4th ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), pp. 673-684; also see Marvin Shaw, Group Dynamics: The Psychology of Small Group Behavior (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967), pp. 84-86.

confirm his preconceptions. The prejudiced person can, as the result of his attribution, treat nonstereotypic behavior in much the same way as he would treat sterectypic behavior. As a result of defensive attributions outgroup members appear to be caught in a paradoxical situation. In normal and friendly interpersonal communication encounters people can hopefully, by their verbal and/or nonverbal actions, communicate the "content of their character." Genuine information seeking and uncertainty reduction should occur.[16] In an exchange between a prejudiced person and an outgroup member, no matter how the outgroup member behaves she is still prejudged and her behavior is interpreted as proof that the interpreter's prejudice is well-founded.

I contend that interracial contact and communication are the sine qua non of healthy race relations. This is to say that contact and communication between the races is necessary but--as this study suggests--not sufficient for improved race relations. More research needs to be conducted concerning how communication variables influence interracial relationships. In addition, researchers now need to consider the attitudes of the outgroup members and their attributions about the behavior of whites.

This study presupposes contact and communication between the races. The correlation between communicative social distance and

[16] Charles Berger and R. J. Calabrese, "Some Explorations in Initial Interaction and Beyond: Toward a Developmental Theory of Interpersonal Communication," Human Communication Research, 1, No. 2 (Winter 1975), 99-112.

defensive attributional tendencies indicates that the people who make defensive attributional choices are the very people who attempt to avoid close communication with members of other races. Given the break down of segregation and exclusionary zoning plus the heterogeneous nature of our society, attempts by an individual to totally avoid contact with members of other racial and ethnic groups will become increasingly difficult. When contact occurs communication is unavoidable. Every action a person takes in the presence of others can be interpreted (i.e. it has potential meaning). Often the meanings assigned to these behaviors take the form of causal attributions. Total avoidance of contact and communication is, however, only the extreme end of the communicative social distance continuum. When contact cannot be avoided the prejudiced individual will simply engage in very superficial levels of communication when interacting with outgroup members. This conclusion is supported by the correlation between communicative social distance and the other two dimensions of prejudice. Stereotyping was correlated with social distance ($r = .52$) and affective reaction was also correlated with social distance ($r = .69$). Further, at superficial levels of interaction very little personal information, of the type likely to threaten one's attitudes, is likely to be presented.

The arsenal of potential defensive mechanisms that the prejudiced person has at her disposal is truly impressive. First, the prejudiced person can attempt to avoid contact with outgroup members or at least confine the communication to very superficial levels. Second, the prejudiced person can selectively perceive those things that support

his preconceptions and divert his attention from those behaviors that contradict his attitudes.[17] Third, the prejudiced person can discount as atypical any outgroup member who consistently fails to behave in stereotypical ways.[18] Finally, the prejudiced person can use the attribution process to interpret the behaviors of outgroup members as consistent with her attitude. It is important to remember, however, that the majority of subjects were quite nondefensive in their attributions about blacks. The key may very well be exposure to nonstereotypic behavior of outgroup members at an early age, before the prejudicial attitudes are firmly established.

[17] Gordon Allport, The Nature of Prejudice 2nd ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958); Andrea Rich, Interracial Communication (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

[18] Allport, pp. 191-192; Rich, pp. 43-51.